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NEWS

Winchester delegation votes to strengthen protections for reproductive, gender-affirming care amid federal threats

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Gov. Maura Healey speaks to the public after signing the Shield Act. 2.0 into law. COURTESY PHOTO/MASS.GOV

The following was submitted by the office of Sen. Jason Lewis:

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State Reps. Michael Day and Michelle Ciccolo and state Sens. Jason Lewis and Pat Jehlen joined their colleagues in the Massachusetts Legislature to pass legislation known as the Shield Act 2.0, strengthening protections for those seeking and providing legal reproductive and gender-affirming care in the Commonwealth.

The Legislature approved the bill, S. 2543, with bipartisan support in both chambers, continuing its track record of ensuring patients control their own healthcare decisions.

The Shield Act 2.0 protects access to reproductive and transgender healthcare in Massachusetts and adds new safeguards for patients and providers at a time when attacks on these rights continue to escalate; including: executive orders from the Trump Administration, federal funding freezes for care providers, a Supreme Court decision ruling against transgender care and other states' lawsuits against physicians providing reproductive healthcare.

The bill builds on the ROE Act, the original shield legislation enacted in 2022.

“The federal government has made one thing clear: Massachusetts is on her own when it comes to protecting the privacy and constitutional rights of our neighbors. The Shield Act 2.0 ensures that legally protected healthcare decisions made here in the Commonwealth do not become the basis for radical prosecutors in other states to exploit individuals or encourage corporations to profit off our personal data,” said Day, who served as the House’s designated legislative leader on this legislation. “The Legislature will always protect our own residents and we will continuously re-affirm the fact that all of our residents have equal protections under our laws and have control over their own healthcare decisions.”

“The Massachusetts Legislature is committed to upholding our state’s values and protecting our residents from the harmful actions of the Trump administration,” said Lewis. “The Shield Act 2.0 will protect patients, providers, and others from retaliatory attacks and continues to put people’s health before politics in Massachusetts.”

“I am so happy to see this bill passed to expand protections,” said Jehlen. “This kind of work is incredibly important right now as part of our state's response to threats from the capital.”

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“Massachusetts continues to lead the way in ensuring our health care remains private and legally protected,” said Ciccolo. “I applaud my colleagues in both branches for their tireless work in drafting this legislation and responding to the Federal developments that continue to threaten our safety and wellbeing.”

Several states have recently passed laws restricting access to reproductive and gender-affirming healthcare while threatening to prosecute individuals who seek those services in Massachusetts.

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The Shield Act 2.0 prohibits state agencies and law enforcement from cooperating with other states or federal investigations into legally protected reproductive or transgender healthcare provided in Massachusetts. It also limits businesses that manage electronic health information from sharing patient data tied to these services.

The new law makes practical updates to protect providers, including the issuance of prescriptions with the name of a healthcare practice rather than an individual practitioner, the exclusion of certain reproductive and gender-affirming medications from the state's drug monitoring programs and the limitations on third-party access to related medical records.

It also makes clear that healthcare professionals are free to provide legal care services in Massachusetts, and the Commonwealth will resist attempts by other states or the federal government to prosecute healthcare professionals for providing those services.

Additional provisions of the law include:

• Enhancing license protections for anyone providing or assisting in the provision of reproductive or gender-affirming care.

• Forbidding insurance companies from discriminating against or penalizing providers who offer reproductive and gender-affirming care.

• Protecting attorneys licensed in Massachusetts from removal or discipline for advising or representing clients on the topics of reproductive or gender-affirming care.

• Clarifying that Boards of Registration may not take disciplinary actions against practitioners for providing legally protected care and prohibiting boards from noting in a provider's records any criminal, legal or

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disciplinary actions brought against them in other jurisdictions for providing care that is legally protected in Massachusetts.

• Prohibiting courts from admitting or considering cases of abuse, neglect, or maltreatment brought against parents or caregivers because they support their child in seeking reproductive or transgender care.

• Requiring acute care hospitals to provide stabilizing health services — including abortion care when necessary — to any patient who is injured or seeking emergency treatment, in response to the Trump Administration's rollback of Biden-era guidance on the Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act (EMTALA) requiring hospitals to provide care in emergency cases.

After the Legislature voted to enact the Shield Act 2.0, Gov. Maura Healey signed the measure into law on Aug. 7.

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'Chicago: Teen Edition' dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. Set in the 1920s, this iconic production is sure to leave the audience wanting more. Performances will

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The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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